

TURTLE FOUNDATION
PROJECT CAPE VERDE
MID-TERM REPORT



SEPTEMBER 2009

CURRENT PROJECT STATUS

There are 5 primary goals to our project:

1. To stop or reduce the killing of female turtles as they come ashore to nest.
2. To create a coalition of the various organizations working in Cape Verde related to sea turtle conservation and research with the aim of standardizing research and conservation protocols and maximizing efforts to protect the species.
3. To promote and increase participation of local and national authorities in sea turtle conservation
4. To increase education and awareness of the local population regarding sea turtles
5. To increase scientific and general knowledge about sea turtles.

Goal #1:

The first and most important objective of our project is to reduce and eventually stop the killing of the Loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) on Boavista Island. Currently the largest threat is the slaughter by poachers of the female turtles as they come ashore to nest. In 2007, at least 1100 turtles were killed, which is estimated at up to 30% of the nesting population of Boavista. In 2008, Turtle Foundation operated patrols on a 10 km section of beach at Porto Ferreira, and reduced the slaughter on that beach by 90% (from approximately 600 in 2007, to 60 in 2008).

This year, 4 beaches are being patrolled and protected by Turtle Foundation: In the north, 5.4 km at Norte Beach; on the east coast 3 km at Canto Beach; in the south 7 km at Lacacão Beach (3 km monitored) and 4 km at Curral Velho Beach (see also separate map for locations). Each of these beaches has been averaging between 2 and 7 turtles nesting per night in the early season (J. Hancock, pers. com.) Porto Ferreira Beach is being protected by Natura 2000, one of Turtle Foundation's partners in the Cape Verde Sea Turtle Network, for the 2009 nesting season.

Turtle Foundation personnel on site consists of 3 staff members; Christian Roder, the in-country project director, Julio Rocho, in charge of public relations, and Joana Hancock, the field work coordinator. We work with a team of 10 soldiers who are supervised by one Sergeant, and a team of up to 10 volunteers. We patrol in total 15Km of beach, spread across 4 beaches, located in the North (Norte beach), East (Canto beach) and South (Curral Velho and Lacacão beaches) coast.

Operational headquarters is located in the village of Fundo das Figueiras, where soldiers and volunteers receive their meals, and stay during the day.

The night is spent in army tents, set up in two beaches: Canto and Norte, where one or more mixed groups of soldiers patrol continuously for most of the night. These tents don't have any facilities, and are only used as a shelter.

There is also a small camp set up in Lacacão beach that serves both the beaches in Lacacão and Curral Velho. The camp is equipped with extremely basic facilities such as an outdoor kitchen and a toilet area. Soldiers are rotated every two days between this camp and the headquarters in Fundo das Figueiras.

The main part of the work, patrol of the beaches, takes place at night, when most of the turtles nest. Beaches are usually monitored between 9pm and 5 am. During the day, soldiers and volunteers have some free time, although general tasks such as equipment maintenance, housekeeping, and specific tasks such as painting beach signs, participating in public events, beach clean-ups etc. may also be organized.

On Lacacão Beach, a large hotel is being constructed. The presence of large numbers of workers who view the turtles as a potential source of food, as well as the construction activities which disturb both the adult females' nesting behavior and will certainly affect the hatchlings' post-emergence orientation are the primary problems. The light used at the construction site during the early hours of the night have been a deterrent to nesting turtles, or a cause of severe disorientation observed on turtles, who stay up to 3-4 hours on the beach, trying to locate a safe place to nest, often becoming too exhausted to nest.

The effect of these patrols is overwhelming positive. The patrol teams find turtles "turned turtle" on the beach awaiting the poachers' return, and patrol staff then turn the turtles right side up and allow them to return to the sea. When turtles are seen coming up on the beach, or are encountered during a nesting event, patrol staff remain to protect the turtle from harm until they return to the sea. The presence of the patrols serves as a deterrent to poachers' appearance on the nesting beaches. However, the poachers know our resources are limited, and the goal of completely stopping the slaughter has yet to be realized. The lack of sufficient numbers of people to implement patrols and the lack of on-site camps at all nesting beaches results in turtles still being killed, but the numbers of turtles killed on beaches monitored by Turtle Foundation are greatly reduced from what would be occurring in the absence of the patrols; thus the goal of reducing the slaughter has been quite successful.

It is important to note that Turtle Foundation's ultimate goal is to eventually leave the conservation of Cape Verde's sea turtles in the hands of Cape Verde's government and own people. With education and awareness of the benefits and importance of maintaining biodiversity, as well as the income and tourism opportunities afforded by the presence of these endangered sea

turtles on the beaches, Turtle Foundation hopes that our presence in Cape Verde will not be needed indefinitely. We recognize, however, that the situation is currently quite dire, and that without these patrols in the short term, there will not be turtles left in the long term for the Capeverdean people to appreciate.

Goal #2:

In 2009, Turtle Foundation became the leading member in the creation of the Cape Verde Sea Turtle Network (CVSTN), a coalition of NGO's, government authorities, and research organizations working in Cape Verde. Our objectives are to standardize protection and research methods, to increase communication and participation among the various organizations involved in turtle conservation, and to maximize our efforts by concentrating on our organizations' individual strengths and minimizing overlap.

Our partnerships and achievements so far include the following:

- Turtle Foundation has a signed Memorandum of Understanding with the General Directorate for Environment at the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture in Praia that includes approval for our project as part of a five-year plan by the government of Cape Verde to protect sea turtles.
- Turtle Foundation has received from the local Municipality of Boavista permits to allow operation of all research and conservation activities on Boavista Island.
- The military based on Sal is providing soldiers to Turtle Foundation to participate in beach patrols as security for our personnel and to provide support and additional deterrence to poachers.
- Associação Amigos do Ambiente de Sal Rei (Friends of the Environment of Sal Rei) is a local NGO that is partnering with Turtle Foundation in the organization of cultural and environmental events on Boavista.
- Natura 2000 is an international NGO that is partnering with Turtle Foundation to patrol beaches on Boavista and together are working to establish protocols for protecting the nesting beaches.
- Turtle Foundation has been working with local tour companies (such as Barracuda Tours, Clam Tours, Vista Verde and Magic Tours) to arrange visits for tourists to nesting beaches to see turtles nest and/or hatchlings emerge from nests. Turtle Foundation provides guidelines for turtle observation on nesting beaches, training of local guides, and educational material. In exchange, these companies encourage donations from tourists to nature conservation in Boavista, through the local environmental agency.
- In July 2009, The CVSTN and the Institute for the Development of Fisheries (INDP) began a joint project on the island of Sao Nicolau to reduce the slaughter of nesting turtles. Initial efforts will focus on training guards to patrol the beaches, but data collection and a turtle tagging program are planned for the future.

Goal #3:

The third goal aims to promote and increase participation of local and national authorities in sea turtle conservation. This goal is being addressed in concert with the 2nd and 4th goals of creating and implementing a Coalition group, and of increasing education and awareness of sea turtles in the community. As previously stated, Turtle Foundation has secured the support of the local and national authorities on Boavista for the implementation of our programs.

Between the 21st and 23rd of August Turtle Foundation participated in a Camp with the theme "Escola na Natureza" ("School in Nature") organized by Associação Ambiental de Sal Rei, a local government organization. Turtle Foundation members gave presentations addressing the sea turtles, impacts of the slaughtering, and trash on the sea turtle populations, provided educational guided night visits to the Boa Esperança beach, and participated in the beach clean-up activities organized during the weekend. Turtle Foundation intends to continue and expand programs in collaboration with local and national authorities (see below).

While it is currently against the law in Cape Verde to kill sea turtles or harvest the eggs, until recently the government has not had the resources to prosecute offenders. One of Turtle Foundation's continued objectives is to increase the support of the Cape Verde legal system in prosecuting those who kill turtles or collect eggs. In July 6 men were arrested for processing turtle meat on Sal Island. In June, 2 locals were arrested on Fogo Island for collecting eggs. They were sentenced to 8 months in prison, but the sentence was suspended. In October, a local was arrested on Lacacão Beach during a Turtle Foundation patrol for poaching a nest and we are hopeful there will be legal consequences for the offender. Enforcement of the existing laws will be a deterrent to other poachers.

Goal #4:

The fourth goal stated for our project involves educating and involving the local community regarding the needs and benefits of sea turtle and biodiversity conservation. Turtle Foundation began to address this goal in 2008, and has continued in 2009.

2008

In October of 2008, all the schools in Boavista participated in an art contest, and Turtle Foundation arranged the transport of the students and their art posters from the villages to Sal Rei, where all the posters were presented. In addition, a local artist "Titu" and a local environmental club helped students paint a nearby wall with a sea turtle conservation motif. Turtle Foundation also sponsored a turtle conservation and information presentation in Sal Rei. The event was extremely well attended and well received, and Turtle

Foundation is now well known in Boavista for supporting the local community as well as supporting the conservation of Cape Verde's sea turtles.

2009

- In early June Turtle Foundation addressed the local "Capoeira" group (a Brazilian form of martial arts), a group of youngsters from 10-25 years old, giving an awareness presentation, and getting the group to commit to participate in turtle conservation. This group later participated in 3 beach clean-ups, and some members joined or volunteered in one or more patrols.
- Between the 5th -7th of June, two members of the Turtle Foundation attended the II Environmental Fair in the City of Mindelo, São Vicente, representing the project and its efforts in the protection of the sea turtles in Boavista. The stand was one of the most visited in the fair, and was particularly successful with local kids, who visited the stand regularly to paint and submit TF postcards in a public display.
- Between June 28th and July 8th several training sessions were held in Sal Rei for the nature guides of several tour agencies. These sessions included several lectures, followed by intensive training at the beaches, and provided information about sea turtle biology and ecology, and guidelines for turtle watching in nesting beaches.
- On July 27th, Turtle Foundation and local tour operators sponsored a beach clean-up at Boa Esperança. An estimated 50-75 local people and tourists participated in collecting trash along a 500 meter stretch of beach, leaving it virtually spotless. Our volunteers returned a month later to do some more additional clean-up.
- On August 3rd, Turtle Foundation organized a beach clean-up in Canto Beach, an event that drew an estimated 50 local people, who cleaned a 2 km stretch of beach.
- On August 8th we collaborated in the organization of another beach clean-up organized by a Portuguese group called "Projecto Cabo Verde" in the Sal Rei Islet, that concluded with the painting of a new sea turtle mural in Sal Rei. Both volunteers and soldiers working with TF participated.
- On August 3rd during the local festivities occurring in the village of Bofareira, TF members gave a video presentation accompanied by a short talk that explained to the locals the threats that their sea turtles face. The videos addressed both the problems of the turtle hunting, and the impact of trash.
- Between the 21st and 23rd of August we participated in a Camp with the theme "Escola na Natureza" ("School in Nature") organized by Associação Ambiental de Sal Rei, by giving presentations addressing the sea turtles,

and impacts of the slaughtering, and trash on the sea turtle populations, providing educational guided night visits to the Boa Esperança beach, and participating in the beach clean-up activities organized during the weekend.

- Also, for the same time period we started supervising the replacement of the roof in Bofareira's kindergarden, and general fixing of the building, so that it is ready for the next school year, as part of our commitment to the improvement of the living conditions of the communities in the areas in which we work.

Finally, through our volunteers and partner tour companies, we have been collecting school material, such as books, notebooks, writing and painting material, etc, to distribute to local schools, or events as required.

Turtle Foundation is planning the following activities to be implemented at the end of the nesting season and during the school year 2009/2010:

- Implement an education module in the local school's program that focuses on conservation of sea turtles and their critical habitats, on land and at sea.
- Develop a participative study for the implementation of community based socioeconomic alternatives to the capture and consumption of turtle meat.
- Production and installation of informative signs at the entrance points to each beach. (This may well also be a school project).
- Organization of at least 3 information events for the public and for school children, in Sal Rei, Fundo das Figueiras and João Galego.
- Organization one more 2-day educational beach camps for young teenagers of the Northern coast. (One of these has already been done, see above.)
- Development of small scale awareness campaign about the impact of plastic bags in sea turtles and other marine life.

Goal #5:

Our fifth goal is to increase scientific and general knowledge about the sea turtles of Boavista. Currently, our limited resources are allowing only basic data collection such as counts of nests laid, and mortality assessment of the patrolled beaches. As nests start to hatch, hatch success data will be collected on a limited number of nests. As we accumulate additional information from our patrols on the beaches with the largest numbers of nesting turtles, we will be able to focus on the most important nesting beaches for future protection. We hope to be able to set up additional camps to allow more efficient monitoring, and have facilities that will allow us to expand our project in subsequent years to include a tagging program and to collect additional biological data on the turtles. Our partners in the Coalition, Natura 2000 on Boavista and S.O.S. Tartarugas on Sal are collecting similar

data and may also be collecting additional data, although we do not have information from them at this stage.

PROJECT ASSESSMENT

As our field director wrote in her blog, Turtle Foundation's project in Cape Verde has been both "sweet and sour". The Cape Verde Sea Turtle Network is encouraging communication and cooperation among the various groups working to protect turtles and habitat in Cape Verde. There is no doubt that the results of the patrols have been positive and have reduced the level of mortality on the beaches that are being monitored. The response of the local community to our presence, our efforts at beach clean-up, our participation in school programs and community events, our collaboration with local environmental groups and our evident concern for the environment and welfare of Cape Verde and its turtles has also been overwhelmingly positive. Fifteen kilometers of nesting beach is being monitored and protected for nesting Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*). However, the continued poaching of the turtles and eggs, the rapid development and subsequent habitat degradation of nesting beaches, the lack of enforcement of the existing turtle protections laws, and other threats to the survival of the Loggerhead turtles are all still occurring and make it clear there is still much to be done.

TURTLE FOUNDATION